

# Nidderdale AONB State of Nature 2020

A Summary



THE WILD  
WATCH





**“In an age of climate emergency, nature is our ally; investing in and nurturing wild landscapes, wildlife and our own relationship with the wild is imperative.”**

**Lindsey Chapman**  
TV and Radio Presenter and  
The Wild Watch Patron

Brimham Rocks by Mark Price

## Contents

Introduction	2
Headlines	3
Our Commitments	4
Moorland	5
Grassland and Farmland	5
Woodland and Trees	6
Water and Wetlands	7
Species	7
Natural Capital, Ecosystem Services and Economic Benefits	8
Local Action and People	9
Make a Difference	10

## Introduction

Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a landscape full of contrasts and rich in wildlife. Exhilarating windswept moorlands and steep river valleys merge into gently rolling pastoral scenes, peaceful woodlands and tranquil expanses of water. This is a protected landscape, important in its own right and delivering benefits to you and our economy.

Across the UK wildlife is becoming scarcer with fewer wild places that are increasingly cut off from each other. Our natural world is in serious trouble. This State of Nature report is an overview of Nidderdale AONB's rich wildlife and habitats, providing a baseline against which changes in nature can be monitored and assessed. It summarises the pressures on our nature and the actions that need to be taken to protect wildlife and strengthen the habitats they rely on. We hope it will be of interest to all our partners and stakeholders, and people living in and visiting Nidderdale AONB. It is a springboard for taking large scale action for nature, producing our new Nature Recovery Network Strategy, and working with others to realise our conservation aspirations.

This report has been produced by Nidderdale AONB as part of The Wild Watch project. The Wild Watch project was a three year National Lottery Heritage funded project which has been carrying out Nidderdale AONB's biggest ever systematic survey for wildlife. It has empowered people to get involved with their local wildlife and gain new natural history skills through learning about and enjoying Nidderdale AONB's natural heritage. The project activities have provided a wealth of new data including an innovative habitat map of the AONB, thousands of species records, and Habitat Suitability Maps that show the best places for some of our key species. This will enable us to deliver targeted conservation programmes for locally important species such as curlew and adder. It has also developed an army of trained surveyors who will continue collecting new data into the future.

We have created this report under the guidance of a steering group and with support from many local and national organisations and individuals who have provided data and written content. We would like to thank all of those who have contributed and made this report possible, including National Lottery players.

The full report can be downloaded from  
**[nidderdaleaonb.org.uk/stateofnature](https://nidderdaleaonb.org.uk/stateofnature)**

Front and back cover images by David Tolcher



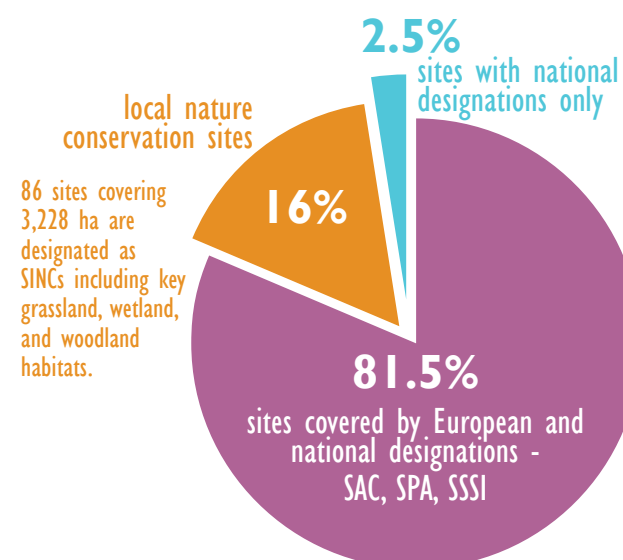
## Headlines

Nidderdale AONB supports a rich variety of wildlife through its wide range of habitats including moorland, grassland and farmland, woodland and trees, and water and wetlands.

Almost 35% of the AONB has additional legal protection for its nature, designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Special Areas for Conservation (SAC). These sites are our nature 'jewels' and offer valuable refuges to wildlife and are natural spaces for people.

Nidderdale AONB has a long history of active naturalist groups and people volunteering to do practical nature conservation. The Wild Watch project has built on this foundation, raising awareness of the AONB's nature and collecting large amounts of new survey data. More than 3,000 new surveys were carried out and 1,095 new citizen science records submitted. Over 6,400 people attended more than 140 events and volunteers gave over 4,500 hours.

**20,600 ha**  
of designated sites:



2,050 ha (12%) of the AONB's SSSIs are in 'favourable' condition, compared to 39% of English SSSIs. 15,300 ha (88%) are in 'unfavourable recovering' condition, compared to 55% of English SSSIs, meaning they have been entered into a scheme to improve their condition over time.

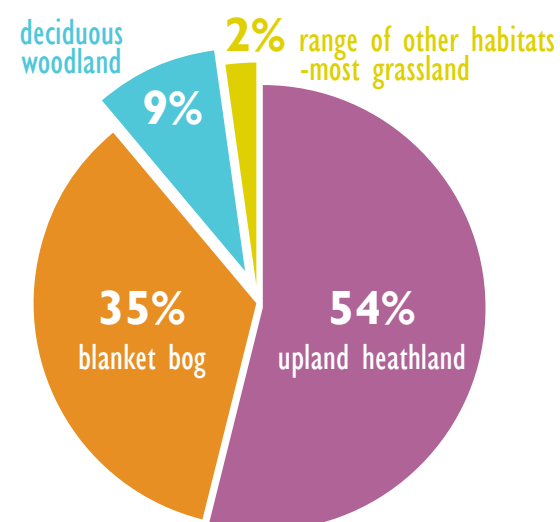


Curlew by Paul Skirrow

Nationally nature is at risk, wild places are becoming scarcer and many species are in decline. Threats to Nidderdale AONB's nature mirror many of the national trends such as changing agricultural management, climate change, invasive non-native species, and how habitats are managed.

The creation of Nature Recovery Networks to make wildlife-rich sites 'bigger, better and more joined up' is seen as a key mechanism to address this decline. Protected landscapes such as national parks and AONBs can act as large-scale nature recovery areas. At Nidderdale AONB we want to be at the forefront, using the vital new knowledge from The Wild Watch project to facilitate landscape-scale conservation work.

**24,000 ha**  
of priority habitat:



16,934 ha (70%) of the AONB's priority habitat is within designated sites. 16,645 ha (98%) of this is moorland habitat, including heathland and blanket bog.

## Our Commitments

### We are strongly committed to:

- Fostering a sustainable landscape, rich in wildlife:** During the next phase of The Wild Watch project we will produce a Nature Recovery Network Strategy built from the findings in this State of Nature report. This will guide us in improving, expanding and connecting habitats, and delivering landscape conservation actions in and beyond protected sites.
- Improving our designated sites:** We will nurture the recovery of our designated sites, ensuring they are managed to the highest standards. By 2024 we will ensure that at least 25% of our SSSI's are in favourable condition and 50% of our local wildlife sites (Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs)) have up-to-date management plans.
- Working in partnership:** We will work with you, our stakeholders and partners, to respond to the threats identified in this report by protecting wildlife and strengthening the habitats that they rely on, promoting Nidderdale AONB's biodiversity, supporting volunteers, and raising funds for nature conservation work.
- Protecting habitats:** We will improve the management of priority habitats which are not currently protected. We have produced a detailed habitat model of the AONB as part of The Wild Watch project, and will use this to underpin decision-making about future conservation action.

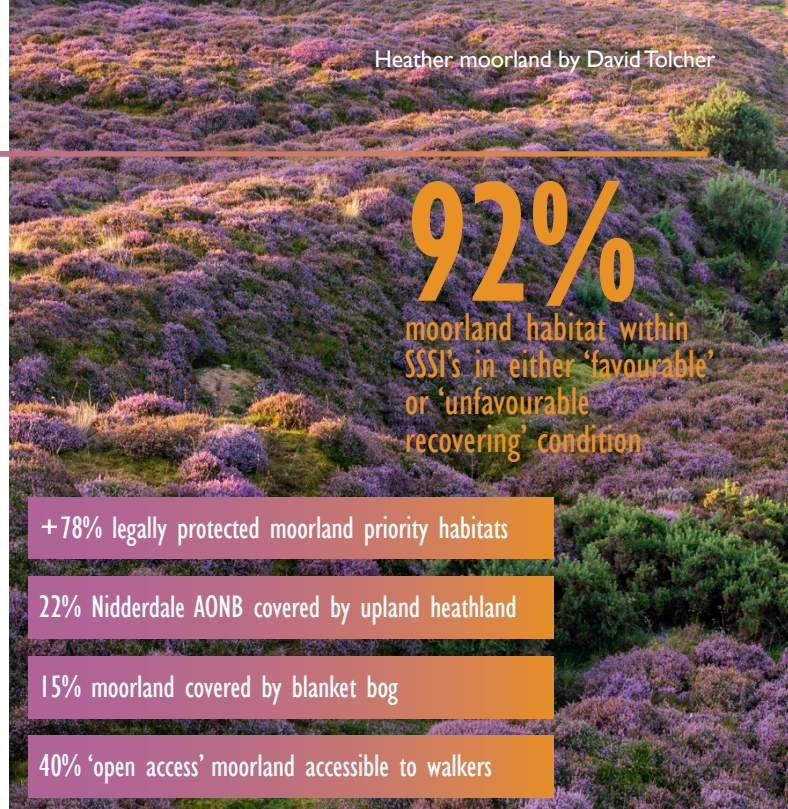


**AONB status** means that Nidderdale is one of the country's finest landscapes, important for its landscape, its wildlife and its cultural heritage. These special qualities are important assets in their own right, but also for the benefits to people and their contributions to economic and social capital.



## Moorland

- Nidderdale AONB has some of the finest heather moorlands in the country including areas of upland heath, blanket bog, and upland flushes, fens and swamps.
- Nationally, moorland habitats are under threat from inappropriate management, climate change, air pollution, and increases in commercial forest cover. Since 2009, restoration work has been undertaken connected with 17,410 ha of Nidderdale AONB's moorland habitats.
- Nidderdale AONB is also important at a national scale for birds of prey, although key species such as peregrine and hen harrier may be at risk from disturbance and persecution.
- Nidderdale AONB is important at a national level for wading birds including curlew, lapwing and snipe, whose populations are declining elsewhere. We have developed Habitat Suitability Maps for these species to help us target conservation action.



### Our Moorland Commitments:

We will work alongside moorland land managers and the Yorkshire Peat Partnership to restore peat habitats, ensuring our moorland is well managed for nature, and collaborate with others to safeguard birds of prey, preventing their illegal persecution.

## Grassland and Farmland

- Species-rich grassland and meadows support rare plants and wildlife, a unique mix that has evolved over 1000s of years. Nidderdale AONB has over 115 ha, which includes upland calcareous grassland and upland hay meadows.
- 96% of Nidderdale's grassland is not legally protected and, like many grasslands across the UK, are under threat from agricultural intensification, lack of protection, neglect, and pressure from development.
- At a national scale most specialist farmland birds are in decline and this is most likely also the case in Nidderdale AONB.
- We have developed Habitat Suitability Maps for skylark and song thrush which we will use to target conservation action.

### Our Grassland and Farmland Commitments:

Our specialist staff will continue working with and supporting landowners to restore hay meadows, offer advice on balancing farming needs with nature, increasing farm resilience, and accessing land management grants. We will also support Yorkshire Water's plans to expand its network of 'Beyond Nature' farms.



Hay Meadow by Paul Skirrow

## Woodland and Trees

- Trees and woods are an essential part of our landscape. Despite this only 8% of Nidderdale AONB is woodland, lower than the 10% that covers England. Most of the AONB's woodlands are located in the east of the AONB in areas of lower elevation. Below the moorland line the woodland cover in the AONB is 13%, which is above the national target.
- Around 5% of our woodland is legally protected and, like woodland at a national level, all of our woodland is under threat from climate change, fragmentation, invasive species, tree diseases, and pests.
- 25% of Nidderdale AONB's woodland is categorised as ancient semi-natural woodland (ASNW) or plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAVS). This covers 2% of the AONB which is slightly lower than the figure of 2.3% for the UK.
- At the UK level woodland birds have declined by 20% since 1970 and woodland butterflies by 51% since 1991.
- We have developed a Habitat Suitability Map for redstart which we will use to target conservation action.

### Our Woodland and Trees Commitments:

We will produce a new woodland opportunity plan to help us forge new partnerships with landowners and land managers so we can plant more trees, restore damaged ancient woods, and sustainably manage woodland. The myriad of benefits from this will include new wildlife habitat, locking up carbon, and preventing flooding. We will take action against tree pests and diseases by raising awareness of ash die back, and using a wide mix of native trees sourced and grown in the UK and Ireland.



**2 million**  
tonnes of carbon locked up in the AONB's woodland

8% Nidderdale AONB covered by woodland

10% England covered by woodland

35% AONB woodland: planted conifer woodland

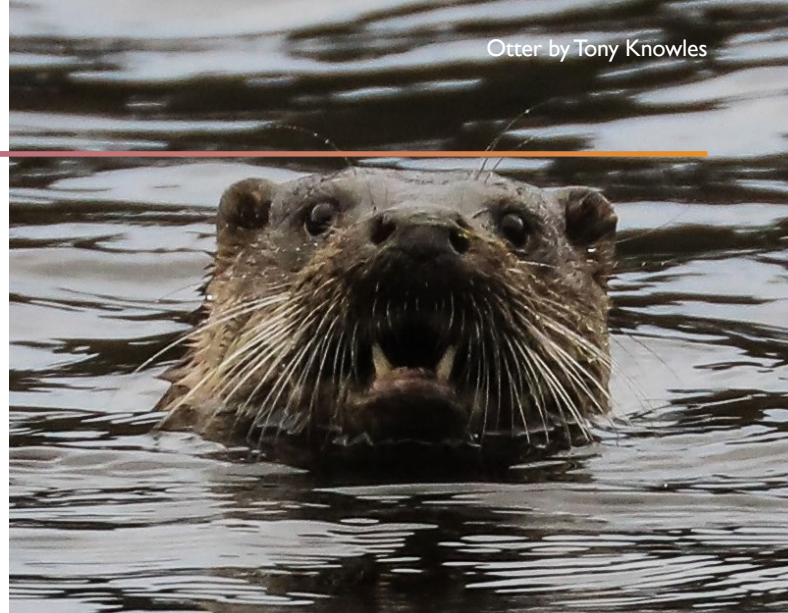
50% AONB woodland: broadleaved woodland

Woodland by David Tolcher



## Water and Wetlands

- Water shapes and defines Nidderdale AONB, the many rivers, streams, reservoirs and ponds support many different plants and animals.
- Most of our water and wetlands are not legally protected. Only Gouthwaite Reservoir, which is important for many species of birds, is designated as a SSSI.
- Threats to Nidderdale AONB's water and wetlands include pollution, physical modifications of water courses, and invasive species.
- We have developed Habitat Suitability Maps for dipper and grey wagtail which we will use to target conservation action.



Otter by Tony Knowles

### Our Water and Wetlands Commitments:

We are committed to healthy waterways by controlling non-native invasive plants such as Himalayan balsam, restoring habitats to hold water in the landscape, and provide natural solutions to flooding. Our specialist staff will continue to work with landowners and managers to improve water and air quality, and access grants.

## Species

- Nidderdale AONB is home to some iconic wildlife such as otters, curlew and black grouse.
- The Wild Watch project has collaborated with others to collect new information on a large number of species including mammals, birds, invertebrates, and flowering plants.
- We have made a great start but more information is needed to better understand long-term population trends. We will continue to gather information through a variety of initiatives including citizen science and targeted surveys, for example establishing an ongoing monitoring programme for adders.
- We have developed Habitat Suitability Maps for a variety of species which we will use to target conservation action.

### Our Species Commitments:

We will continue to increase our knowledge of the AONB's wildlife through citizen science and volunteering initiatives. We will target on the ground conservation work using The Wild Watch Habitat Suitability Models and establishing effective collaborations, for example for key species such as curlew and adder.



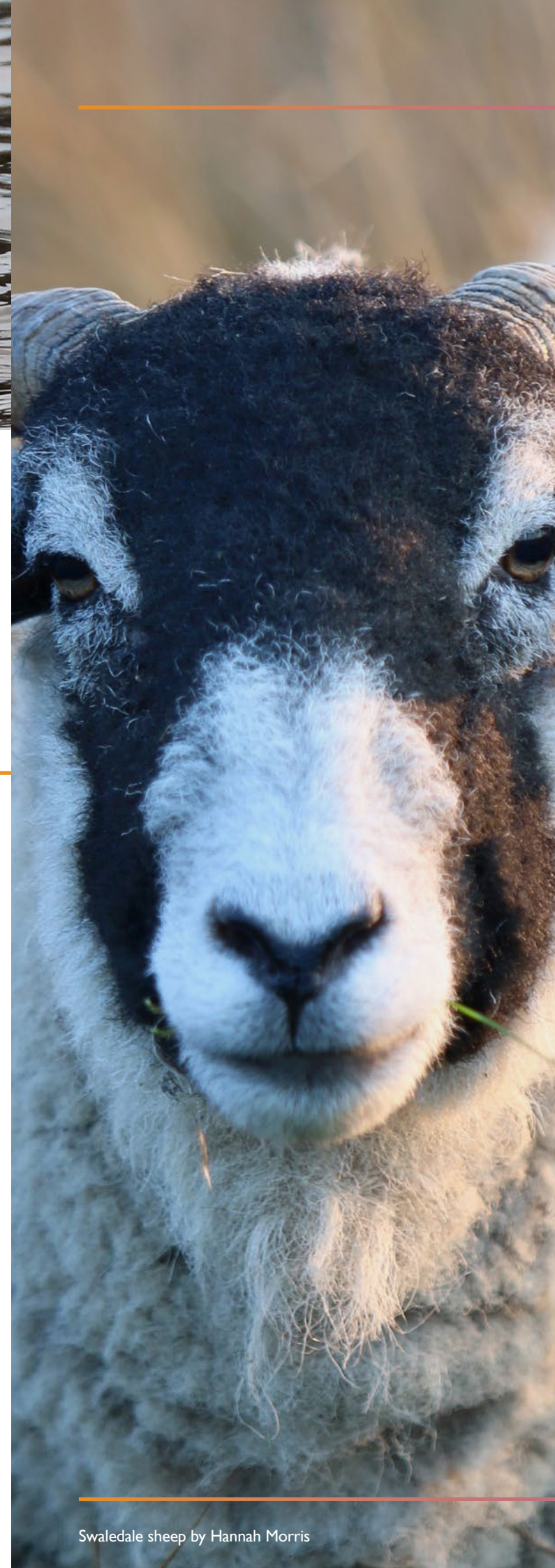
Betony by Kelly Harmar

## Natural Capital, Ecosystem Services and Economic Benefits

- Natural capital is 'the sum of our ecosystems, species, freshwater, land, soils, minerals, our air and seas. These are all elements of nature that directly or indirectly bring value to people and the country at large'.
- In Nidderdale AONB there is very significant delivery of:
  - Provisioning services: drinking water, food production
  - Regulating services: carbon storage and sequestration, water flow (flood regulation)
  - Cultural services: aesthetic experiences, recreation

### Our Natural Capital Commitments:

We would like to further analyse Nidderdale AONB's Natural Capital, ecosystem services, and economic benefits so that we can better understand the link between our landscapes and Yorkshire's economy.



Swaledale sheep by Hannah Morris



## Local Action and People

- It is universally agreed that a wildlife-rich natural world is a foundation for our wellbeing and prosperity. Despite this there is a recognised gap between people's interest in nature and their actions. This is partly thought to be due to a disconnection with nature. It is crucial that people of all ages are able to experience wildlife and enjoy its benefits.
- Nidderdale AONB has a long history of active naturalist groups and practical nature conservation volunteers. The Wild Watch Project sought to build on this, raising awareness of Nidderdale AONB's nature with wider audiences and collecting large amounts of new survey data.

- Over the last five years public sector spending on biodiversity in the UK has declined, while spending by NGOs has increased. Nidderdale AONB has worked to channel grants into nature conservation.

### Our Local Action and People Commitments:

We will inspire and empower people to stand up for nature and experience our wildlife by volunteering with us, taking part in citizen science initiatives, and joining local naturalist groups. We will enable local action by channelling funds to make small conservation projects a reality.

## Make a Difference

### How you can get involved

- If you are a landowner or manager contact us for land management or grant advice or if you are interested in volunteers carrying out work on your land.
- Volunteer with us or take part in our citizen science initiatives.
- Come to one of our events and find out more about Nidderdale AONB, its habitats and wildlife.
- Join one of the local naturalist groups.
- Submit casual species records to us.
- Go out, explore and enjoy Nidderdale AONB's nature for yourself.

### When you are out and about in the AONB

- Follow the Countryside Code and the Moorland Visitor's Code.
- Take biosecurity measures. Clean your shoes and bike wheels before and after visiting, and avoid taking plant material or cuttings to or from the countryside.
- Protect plants and animals and take your litter home.

**£86,000**  
amount invested in local  
wildlife and heritage  
conservation projects

+3,000: new surveys carried out

1,095: citizen science records submitted

140: wildlife events

6,400: wildlife event attendees

+4,500: hours donated by volunteers

£3.4 million: amount of external grants awarded

Fun in the Nidd by Paul Skirrow

Hikers on the Nidderdale Way by Paul Skirrow





Nidderdale  
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



**HERITAGE  
FUND**

